7 Emerging Concepts and Case Studies of Eco-cultural Tourism

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7.1 Introduction

With emerging concepts of cultural landscapes and cultural ecology (see Rotherham, 2008a), it seems there are opportunities to apply the same conceptual approach to tourism and to its impacts on regional and local economies.
While cultural tourism can seem a very closely-focused field, and indeed one directed very much towards urban cultural capital (for example, Richards, 1996), given a wider remit, it offers the basis for a more inclusive and useful framework. Stebbins (quoting Reisinger, 1994), defined cultural tourism as a genre of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional or psychological. (Stebbins, 1996, p. ?)

This goes further than referring to museums, galleries, festivals, architecture, historic ruins, artistic performances and heritage sites, all of which regularly draw tourists and other recreational visitors (Rotherham, 2007). Bachleitner (1999) suggests that cultural tourism is applicable not only to cities but to rural areas too, and that it can be important in fostering rural tourism. In this same paper the author highlights the impacts of rural cultural tourism through economics, image improvement and better development prospects. At the same time, Trauer (2006) considers the complexities of special interest tourism and proposes models or frameworks to help structure and direct future research and to guide conceptual development. MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) also take cultural tourism out of the town and into peripheral rural areas. They note that cultural tourism can help rural areas counter the economic declines of primary traditional industries like fishing and farming. Alongside the emerging concept of cultural tourism has been the development of ecotourism ideas, which are academically interesting but of questionable merit when applied. The challenges of tourism diversification and definition in rural areas have been considered by, for example, Sharpley (2002).

### 7.2 Setting the Context for Nature-based and Cultural Tourism

Wildlife-based tourism is often assumed to be inherently sustainable (Roe et al., 1997), even though observation confirms that this is not so. However, managing and developing appropriate resources for tourism and leisure can be problematic. Indeed, the relationships between tourism growth, local economic development, indigenous cultures, nature and heritage remain complex and frequently disjointed. Concepts such as ‘ecotourism’, while accessible and popular, are often misunderstood, misused and in their purest sense refer to something almost unattainable and with limited economic impact. Defined by the Ecotourism Society, ecotourism is nature-based speciality travel centred on ‘responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people’ (http://www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism). This definition is widely-accepted in principle, but is not a functional definition for gathering statistics, and there is no globally accepted mechanism for gathering ecotourism data. Also, many researchers consider ecotourism to be a specialty segment of the larger nature-tourism market. However, and here confusion arises, many researchers and practitioners use the terms interchangeably. There is a considerable practitioner and researcher information base with, for example, The Ecotourism Society’s bibliography showing hundreds of papers, book chapters and technical reports on the subject. But there remains a question as to how much of this is ‘ecotourism’ at all, and how much is pure ‘ecotourism’.

Roe et al. (1997) addressed issues of wildlife tourism and ecotourism aspirations and definitions in some detail. Ecotourism is a fast-growing component of tourism (Higgins, 1996; Herath, 2002), one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry worldwide, according to the World Tourism Organization (1995). Furthermore, it has been described as a niche market (Bell and Lyall, 2002) and Preece et al. (1995) questioned the time and resources dedicated to ecotourism as a small component of tourism. In 1996 Brandon claimed that ecotourism and nature-based tourism had not lived up to expectations, though others suggest that ecotourism and nature-based tourism may ‘green’ mainstream tourism (Preece et al., 1995). Additionally, Stucker Rennicks (1997) suggested nature-based tourism had come of age for ‘green’, cultural and nature tourists, and for mainstream tourists enjoying nature-based experiences on holiday. This nature-based tourism, wildlife tourism and adventure tourism is
increasingly significant, but often this is not ecotourism. Even the degree to which such tourism can be sustained or considered sustainable is open to debate. The need to address more thoroughly the issues and nature of ecotourism has been noted:

The recent wave of support for ecotourism has been based largely on anecdotal reports of impacts combined with unverified ‘common-sense’ propositions such as the idea that ecotourism is ecologically benign because ecotourists are environmentally sensitive. (Lindberg, 1992)

Taking the impacts of wildlife- and nature-based tourism further, Roe et al. (1997) discuss the potential problems and suggest ways to resolve them. However, these analyses tend to focus specifically on travel to protected sites, areas and reserves, rather than the wider ‘ordinary’ countryside or rural landscape.

Furthermore, in terms of assessing impacts, the idea of ‘sustainable tourism’ (Bramwell and Lane, 1993) begs the question of what exactly is being ‘sustained’ and how this might be evidenced. Reviewing tourism literature, including that on both ecotourism and sustainable tourism, it is clear that the ‘eco-’ component of the studies is often weak or even non-existent. In that case, how has the delivery of either nature conservation or environmental sustainability been assessed and verified. In part this is a consequence of the separation, certainly in British universities and government agencies, between the disciplines that focus on tourism, leisure, economics, ecology and environmental sciences. Cross-disciplinary dialogues are relatively rare and often only short term; a problem driven home by the brutal purism of government research assessment exercises and the need for mainstream academic discipline-based impacts. The consequence is that much of the ‘eco-’ in ecotourism is very weak, and the history in heritage tourism similarly so. There are attempts (e.g. du Cros, 2001) to help make tourism, and in particular cultural tourism, more sustainable. The latter paper attempts to link tourism and cultural heritage management and to address issues regarding the sustainability of heritage tourism.

7.3 Problems with Definitions and Niches

Observations and action research with stakeholders in the UK and around the world suggest that there are problems with the artificial separation of tourism resource components or what we might term as the ‘capital’ on which the industry is based. Touristic niches seem to be defined according to the activity of the tourist rather than the nature of the resource, but in attempting to manage the latter sustainably, this is not necessarily helpful. These issues were highlighted for the UK in recent papers (Rotherham, 2008a, 2008b). Moreover, the result of the academic and researcher problems noted above is that the separation of different segments or components of tourism and leisure are often unsatisfactory. A consequence is also the separation of financial flows in terms of the costs of resource provision (capital and revenue) and of income from touristic and leisure activities. Essentially, with a few notable exceptions, the costs of resource and access provision are borne by the public purse, but the financial benefits flow to the private sector. The income and outlay are only balanced indi-rectly by tax revenues from business expenditures, from individual expenditures and from associated employment to treasury coffers.

However, in the current scenarios of the economic downturn, the tax revenue does not flow back to local authority countryside services, National Park authorities and others who provide access and other essential infrastructural support. Very often farmers and others who provide and manage the landscape backdrop to rural tourism are similarly omitted from the economic flow. Unless farmers are able to develop their business through entrepreneurship into activity or accommodation provision, or by diversification into a farm shop, then they are disadvantaged by the emerging tourism-based rural economy. As local and national government support through advisory bodies, agencies and grants is slashed, farmers find it even harder to move into new fields of provision. In England, the recent demise (2011) of the Farming and Wildlife Groups, or FWAG, illustrates the loss of such an advisory service. A consequence of the opaqueness of benefit and
cost in tourism development is a lack of conservation of, or investment in, critical eco-cultural capital and infrastructure. The need to foster cross-disciplinary approaches to these problems and to provide the necessary inclusive frameworks for research is ever-more urgent.

It is suggested therefore that an approach that considers leisure and tourism from the perspective of the resource and its management can be helpful. Furthermore, it is argued that this focus for interrogation must recognize that landscape is both ecological and cultural.

### 7.4 Traditionally Managed Landscapes as a Backdrop to Rural Tourism

Nature and traditionally managed landscapes provide an arena within which much tourism is played out (Doncaster et al., 2005; Rotherham, 2008b). Even leisure and tourism in urban settings often take place against a backdrop of scenery and rural culture. In Britain a significant majority of the visitors to Cornwall, a major tourism destination, were drawn by the ‘natural’ scenery and the cultural and literary association and mythology of the region. However, the landscape that provides this important setting is the result of long-term and intimate interactions between nature and culture that reflects traditions, heritage and ecology.

### 7.5 Cultural Severance and its Implications

As discussed in recent papers (e.g. Rotherham, 2008a), the breakdown of traditional management in landscapes across Europe is leading directly to massive declines in ecological quality and associated biodiversity. Furthermore, until very recently, much of this loss and the changes responsible for it have been generally overlooked. However, the implications for leisure, tourism and regional economics are very serious. Declining ecology, derelict landscapes and de-populated rural areas leave little that is positive for the tourist (Rotherham, 2008a, 2008b). Yet often the ecologists see these changes as positive steps and frequently describe them as re-wilding (Rotherham, 2008b). Furthermore, the suggestion is made that such rural areas as the Pennines can be economically powered by ecotourism, which will replace traditional farming (see Anderson, 2004). Critical questions of who the tourism actors might be in such de-populated landscapes without local communities or ‘opportunities to spend’ to draw down tourist income were overlooked (Rotherham, 2008b). Fundamental to these misunderstandings and misplaced aspirations is the basic omission of the eco-cultural nature of landscape. This fundamental difficulty carries forward into debates on tourism (for examples of cultural severance, see Figs 7.1 and 7.2).

### 7.6 The Ecotourism Myth

The term ecotourism has been adopted widely as a generic description of tourism with a primary aim to interact with nature and at the same time to involve minimal negative impacts. Furthermore, there is an assumption that local communities will benefit from such tourism and that in the process of these interactions and activities, nature will be conserved (Roe et al., 1997). The phrase that is widely adopted to summarize this is to ‘take only photographs, steal only time, leave only footprints’, but in most cases this is aspirational rather than practical. Indeed, in order to have the positive economic impacts and benefits that key stakeholders advocate will flow from such tourism development, there must be change in both communities and in the environmental resource. These are not necessarily negative or damaging, but they are impacts.

As noted earlier, ecotourism is an interesting concept and an academically fascinating paradigm. However, much so-called ecotourism is in fact mass tourism to watch wildlife or experience nature. According to Xiang Huang (personal communication), ecotourism in the rapidly expanding marketplace of mainland China is clearly mass tourism to view wildlife experiences. As such it is not ecotourism and it is not benign but often damaging to the resource. However, much wildlife tourism, while not fulfilling the requirements of ecotourism, is economically and, if managed carefully,
Fig. 7.1. Overgrown heath in the Peak District suffering from cultural severance and abandonment. (From Author.)

Fig. 7.2. Sheringham Common Site of Special Scientific Interest in Norfolk England suffering from cultural severance. (From Author.)
environmentally beneficial. Indeed, where strict ecotourism is by definition something that has minimal impact and therefore can only ever yield limited benefits, wildlife tourism, managed effectively, can reap substantial rewards. In this context, Roe et al. (1997) consider and assess the various definitions of ecotourism and their relationships with other forms of niche tourism.

I suggest that ‘ecotourism’ as such, misused and misunderstood as it frequently is, can be a problematic concept. Furthermore, since ecotourism in its correct and purest sense can have little impact on people or environment, in terms of regional economic or community development, it is generally irrelevant. As a largely niche end of tourism it is overlooked in terms of emerging planning issues, but damagingly, it clouds relationships with potentially important growth sectors of wildlife-, nature-based, heritage and cultural tourism. These significant drivers in often-struggling rural economies are already overlooked by planners and regional economics analysts; the ecotourism label and its profoundly limited real-life impacts simply confirm their worst fears. In order to change the limited perceptions of nature-based and wildlife tourism as potential drivers in regional economies and, for example, in rural renaissance, it is necessary to re-visit the resource and its assets, and the compartmentalism that hinders effective investigation.

### 7.7 Nature-based, Wildlife and Cultural Tourism

The potential of nature-based and wildlife tourism has been argued and discussed (Roe et al., 1997; Doncaster et al., 2005, 2006) and development of such provision can help trigger economic renewal through both day-visiting and the growth of tourism. The rapid emergence of a tourism visitor economy in South Yorkshire’s Dearne Valley, for example, with 100,000 visitors per year, is just one such case. However, this is clearly a wildlife tourism development and not ecotourism. Furthermore, to continue to grow the tourism economy at this location will require diversification of the experience and the attractions to encompass a wider market. Already, there is an emerging water-sports synergy and a growth of other recreation and sporting activities on offer, such as golf, cycling, horse-riding, garden visiting and countryside walking. A similar pattern can be seen in the nearby Humberhead Levels, where an asset-rich natural environment is providing a context for wildlife leisure, angling, equestrian activities, garden centre visiting, church and heritage visiting, and canal holidays (Doncaster et al., 2005). However, despite the obvious potential, there is little sign of any significant joined-up thinking on site management and regional branding or marketing to consider the regional tourism capital as a holistic whole. It seems that the separation of the various strands and niches is preventing or impairing the marketing of the overall resource. The experiences, destinations and activities on offer mix nature-based and cultural resources.

Furthermore, if we consider the tourism landscape further east, across to the coastline of the East Riding of Yorkshire and the region known as Holderness, this absence of integrated approaches becomes even starker. A recent study (Anon., 2010) considered aspects of wildlife tourism and nature-based tourism in this dramatically under-performing region. In comparison with the hugely successful tourism economy of the north Norfolk coast, the Holderness coastline attracts mostly bottom-end, highly seasonal, low-spending visitors. The higher-spending visitors are almost exclusively day-visitors to the high-profile RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and YWT (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust) sites at Bempton Cliffs Nature Reserve and Flamborough Head. Observation suggests that these visitors go directly to the sites, which themselves have minimal ‘opportunity to spend’, bring their own food and drink, and depart immediately and directly back home at the end of a single-day visit. Their economic benefits to the region and to the local people are therefore minimal. A limited number of bed-and-breakfast providers and a few cottage accommodation owners gain some limited benefit, but this is minimal by comparison with the potential.

The interaction between local visitors, leisure day-visitors and tourists is also unsatisfactory.
From the viewpoint of economic impacts and especially of local business entrepreneurs, the separation makes little sense. Different categories of visitor will have varying needs or desires to spend money, and a business profile needs to anticipate the likely implications of this. However, from a commercial viability perspective, the bottom-line is that you receive visitors and they spend money. Your services and goods, the ‘opportunities to spend’, need to be planned to meet the market, but essentially all income will be welcomed. In Yorkshire, for example, the official tourism market-place assessment for the East Coast resorts omitted visitors from within Yorkshire and Humberside since they were not ‘importing’ economic activity from outside the region. From a business viability perspective, and in terms of planning the visitor economy and the associated services and infrastructure, this is nonsense.

A review of the strengths and weaknesses of the experience on offer here and the infrastructural base suggests that there is a major problem with the quality of service and provision on offer. This is compounded by an absence of joined-up, integrated marketing and investment in the capital base of the tourism industry here. There seems to be little awareness of what the higher-end tourist might require in this landscape in order to visit more frequently, to come in greater numbers, to stay longer and to spend more money. This situation is surprising given the diverse and rich natural and cultural assets of the region, and the fact that this is a long-established tourist destination area. Somehow, the region is failing to capitalize on its capital. I return to this failure later, but in part, I suggest that a fundamental problem is the absence of a coherent and cohesive conceptual framework through which to consider the rural and coastal tourism resource. For this landscape to deliver more fully its tourism economic potential, it is necessary to bring presently disparate leisure and tourism assets and activities together into a single conceptual framework. In particular, there are few efforts for this region to join the different tourism segments to form a coherent whole. The capital resource of the region supports wildlife leisure and tourism, heritage and church tourism, visiting historic houses and gardens, outdoor activities such as horse-riding or sea-fishing. Yet these and related elements of the region’s mass tourism are fragmented and uncoordinated (see, for example, Anon., 2010).

### 7.8 The Emerging Need for a Broad Concept of Eco-cultural Tourism

The idea of ‘eco-cultural tourism’ is not new. There are already papers (e.g. Wallace and Russell, 2004) that use the term ‘eco-cultural tourism’. In this case, the concept is presented as one where ecological and cultural aspects of a landscape combine to create a site and attraction for tourists. However, while this is a major contribution to the present concept, there is still benefit in the idea being more over-arching and inclusive. Wallace and Russell focus quite reasonably on the now standard view of eco-tourism as a specialist micro-niche. They also consider the merits of various approaches to cultural tourism, from visiting a great cathedral in an urban setting to viewing archaeological ruins in a rural location. In this context, Hobsbawn and Ranger’s 1983 contribution on the invention of tradition and the increasing demand for nostalgia is particularly relevant. Issues of balance between high-brow culture and low-brow entertainment are also discussed. Russell and Wallace (2004) also note that ecotourism is not always or necessarily sustainable. These discussions provide a useful platform to develop the idea of eco-cultural tourism for a broadly inclusive sweep of leisure and tourism activities that may be experienced in isolation, in sequence or in combination, as appropriate. However, these definitions of tourism segments are based largely on the behaviour of the tourist and the other tourism stakeholders, rather than on the resource capital – the landscape in which tourism is played out.

Observation confirms that much mass tourism takes place in a context and against a backdrop of natural beauty and cultural richness that provides depth and distinctiveness to a particular locale. In landscape definition terms we would describe this as ‘local character’, and even if this is not the primary target.
of the tourism visit, it may be the reason for the indefinable attractiveness of a destination. As noted, Cornwall is a major and important tourism region and one where the post-industrial economy is otherwise limited and weak. Yet despite much of the Cornish tourism industry being firmly ‘mass tourism’, the over-riding reason for visiting is the natural landscape of moor and tor, and of wild seas and windswept cliff-tops, within which arena the touristic experience is played out. Yet the Cornish visitor is also drawn by the beautifully exotic gardens of this most mild climate of the British mainland, and the historic and cultural heritage and myths of Cornish mines and miners, of seafarers and traders, and a rich literature and art relating to both. The visitor might one day be walking on a cliff-top to see rare flowers, sea birds and basking sharks, and the next day visiting an historic house and a created exotic garden. Evenings may be spent dining on local seafood and drinking distinctive ale from a local brewery, and with a name evocative of regional landscapes and heritage. ‘The Beast’, for example, is a beer that draws its inspiration from the supposed wild cats of the remote Bodmin Moor; a marketing tool mixing a sense of place, a feel for wild nature and a modern myth.

Cultural tourism frequently takes place in a beautiful landscape where nature is a vital component and contact with local wildlife is an important part of the visit. Gardens and grand houses in dramatic landscape settings offer touristic experiences that combine architecture, culture, heritage, history, food and drink and nature, both wild and domestic. Many countryside activities involve outdoor sports, which take place in and around places of natural beauty and of heritage value, and bring high-spending visitors to a destination. Additionally, many visitor destinations provide a range of services and opportunities for local visitors, leisure day-visitors and tourists, and yet these stakeholder groups are often considered and treated as separate entities. These individuals and organizations do not fit simply and comfortably into current tourism classifications. As noted for the Yorkshire coast example, for a small business providing services to visitors at a destination, the place of origin and the time of stay are not relevant except in their influence on the willingness to spend money.

7.9 Stakeholder Synergies and Competition

Planning for and managing a diversity of visitors also demands holistic appraisals and models. With diverse communities of users, there arise conflicts and competition for access to resources such as space and sites. This might, for example, be between anglers and watersports at a lake, or between horse riders, walkers and off-road vehicles on a bridleway. Recent events in the Peak District National Park (see Fig. 7.3), for example, have demonstrated intense competition for space and resources between recreational walkers, off-road four-by-four vehicles and horse-riders. The bitter rivalries lead to major problems in managing the resources sustainably and also become long-running and expensive disputes for local authorities with reduced budgets. Competition runs deep and may extend off the physical site and into the politics of resource allocation, such as through essential grant aid to support or develop provisions. Outdoor sports groups and nature conservation bodies vie with each other for financial support from bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). This is an unspoken but acute rivalry. During action research with stakeholders from this sector under the auspices of the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR) (Rotherham et al., 2006), the depth of the rivalries became sharply apparent. In particular, this was manifest in the rivalries between active sports groups and conservation organizations such as the RSPB (external to the CCPR federation), and also within the umbrella of the CCPR itself. The latter showed as reluctance to use the Ramblers’ Association (a CCPR member) as an example of good practice in sustainable countryside recreation, preferring instead to promote the case study of off-road motorcycling. So in terms of users and the representational organizations there is a wide variety of stakeholders with varying affinities to concepts of sustainable tourism and recreation, but all competing for space and resources.
These issues affect vital aspects of tourism management such as destination development and marketing, and a failure to collaborate presents major disadvantages in terms of potential destination development. Case studies and action research with key stakeholders indicate a lack of collaboration (Capriello and Rotherham, 2008; Doncaster et al., 2005). Within sectors such as wildlife visiting, and between different sectoral actors, there is often little collaboration in promotion and profile development since the other stakeholders are competitors and not collaborators. Individual organizations with similar positions and interests, such as the Wildlife Trusts, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust in say the English Fenlands region generally behave as competitors rather than collaborators (Doncaster et al., 2005). A further problem is that these organizations frequently fail to engage with mainstream tourism agencies and organizations, and the latter don’t see the potential and importance of the major conservation bodies. The situation becomes even more problematic if we extend the review to historic and heritage buildings and sites, and to historic gardens and garden retail (such as garden centres). The tourism agencies and practitioners overlook major components of this broad church of nature-based and heritage tourism, and a review of garden-based attractions suggested that their stakeholders felt ignored and overlooked. It terms of collaboration between these stakeholders and those with conservation and wildlife interests, the reviews showed almost no collaboration at all (Doncaster et al., 2005; Rotherham, 2006; Rotherham et al., 2002).

This lack of joined-up thinking or integrated approaches leads to additional problems when destination development requires infrastructural investment, grant-aid draw-down, and effective badging and marketing. All these issues become fragmented and ineffective. There is a further complication in the way that cost and benefit of countryside or rural visitor infrastructure and support are funded and in the way that they may generate revenue. The necessary investment in infrastructure and conservation or management, for cultural and nature-based destinations and resources, is paid by stakeholders who gain little from the visitor economy. Cost and benefit are often not co-located, and tourism can be seen as
parasitic and economically fickle, and can be highly seasonal too (Rotherham, 2008b). Displacement of established economic sectors can occur and, unless managed carefully, this may be to the long-term detriment of regional development. Infrastructural improvements are often funded from the public purse, but the benefits flow to the private sector. In the current climate of economic austerity, these issues are becoming more deeply ingrained and potentially very damaging.

**7.10 The Silos and Consequences of Compartamentalism**

In this chapter, I argue that addressing the problems of compartmentalization is fundamental to a better understanding of the separate tourism niches. It is also essential to achieving more effective social, economic and ecological impacts of tourism, or at least avoiding unnecessary damage to ecological and cultural resources. The work was undertaken in an attempt to understand both the resource and the emerging tourism industries. In many cases, observation suggests that tourists and other visitors seek mixed portfolios of visitor experiences, which combine nature, heritage, culture, outdoor activities and cuisine. Furthermore, tourism is often actively encouraged and fostered as a driver of economic development in a region. However, in order to justify such tourism development in a region, there must be economic impact, which, like it or not, will bring about a degree of local cultural transformation. Without this, there is no visitor economy and tourism will not be sustained. To facilitate the change, local people and communities will adapt and some may be displaced in contrast, for example, to the purist ethics espoused by ‘real’ ecotourism.

Indeed, with the development of leisure retail outlets, the ‘opportunity to spend’ becomes an essential part of the destination development. Shops supplying local needs and resources such as groceries and household goods cannot compete in the inflated marketplace and are soon displaced by sports goods and outdoor clothing shops. Ultimately, in situations such as Bowness or Ambleside in the English Lake District, the local culture of the destination itself metamorphoses to become a haven for the recreational shopper, set in a majestic natural landscape, but completely alien to the indigenous community now displaced. Just as at Castleton in the English Peak District, the visitors now come to a cultural landscape of gift shops, knick-knacks, and outdoor clothing and equipment. Many experience local nature first hand, as they trudge up a mountain path, but many more bond with the new cultural landscape and wild nature from the comfort of a coffee shop or restaurant. In remote locations, low-key tourism may help maintain and sustain vital services such as local shops, but in destinations that are more popular the result is usually cultural displacement. The situation is exacerbated by the knock-on impact of leisure and tourism demand on local house prices for primary residence, second homes or holiday lets. In popular destination regions, such as National Parks and some coastal areas, local communities are squeezed out of their towns and villages by inflated prices. With reduced local services, high prices in shops and for homes, residence becomes increasingly expensive and exclusive. However, in losing the indigenous community there is a further danger that local heritage and the distinctiveness of local ‘cultural capital’ will decline.

It is clear from case studies across Europe and the UK, in North Africa, and in Asia, that in managing leisure and tourism it is essential to recognize the core components of the underpinning resources. This needs to be within a conceptual framework that allows us to better understand relationships, interactions and potential play-offs between resources and actors within this dynamic landscape. The emerging vision encapsulates both natural and cultural capital and players. Only then will it be possible to manage the tourism resource capital in a way that will allow it to be both sustained and developed. If cultural tourism is to be developed to enhance local economies, then it is necessary to identify the critical facets of the resource base that may facilitate growth. Furthermore, it becomes vital to understand what assets can be compromised or traded and those that are irreplaceable. In developing approaches to these issues for tourism it is
useful to borrow models and ideas from other disciplines such as environmental sciences or economics.

7.11 Critical Resource Capital

In recent decades there have been increasing attempts to find synergies between impact assessment techniques for economics and for the natural environment. These provide useful conceptual ideas that apply to tourism development. Approaches from the natural environmental sciences, nature conservation and countryside recreation management can be informative and adaptable to this broader use. For example, ideas of ‘limits of acceptable change’ (Sidaway and Thompson, 1991; McCool, 1994) and resource ‘carrying capacity’ (Hardin, 1991; Sayre, 2008) are useful and can aid assessment of development and resource-use impacts. In particular, however, the concept of ‘natural capital’ (Ekins et al., 2003) is potentially very useful. The term ‘capital’ is used to describe a stock or resource from which revenue or yield can be extracted. Human well-being arises from the combined use of various types of capital: social capital, human capital and built capital; but these are all based on natural capital. Four basic categories of natural capital are generally recognized: air, water (fresh, groundwater and marine), land (including soil, space and landscape) and habitats (including the ecosystems, flora and fauna, which they both comprise and support) (see Fig. 7.4 for a composite example of multiple natural assets, utilized as a successful eco-cultural tourism destination). This idea emerged in the 1990s, in order to try to resolve apparent conflicts between economic resource evaluations and natural resource conservation. The concept can perhaps form a cornerstone for a broader understanding of tourism uses of, and impacts on, natural or heritage resources.

Natural capital is taken as a way to identify and define the assets of the natural world that perform or provide various usable services. The idea that elements of the resource base are irreplaceable (i.e. critical) and interchangeable or rechargeable (i.e. tradable) provides a basis for assessing the likely impacts of exploitation.

Fig. 7.4. Carsington Water in North Derbyshire: an eco-cultural tourism destination with a million plus visitors per year. (From Author.)
or displacement of natural, heritage or cultural assets. ‘Critical natural capital’ (CNC) is defined as the natural environment that performs important and irreplaceable functions (Chiesura and De Groot, 2003; Gillespie and Shepherd, 1995). In the early days, most of the work in this regard addressed natural sciences issues, mostly relating to life-support systems and ecological services. Little attention was given to socio-cultural functions, human health benefits or well-being. However, current thinking attempts to provide more rounded consideration of critical functions and associated values in relation to health, recreation, amenity, education, heritage and local economies (e.g. Defra, 2007; TEEB, 2010). These functions provide many socio-economic benefits that can be assessed through both qualitative and quantitative valuation methodologies, and are relevant to tourism destination development. Integration of ecology, sociology and economics provides more balanced environmental planning and decision making. Natural capital is a hybrid concept, on the one hand borrowed from economics, and on the other relating to environmental quality, resilience and integrity. It lies at the core of human well-being and long-term sustainable economic activity. However, natural capital differs from human-made or manufactured capital in several ways, as Fig. 7.5 highlights.

The hybridization of these concepts can be continued to include culture and heritage, alongside nature itself. As noted, ideas have been developed to consider the balance between critical natural capital, which cannot be replaced or repaired if lost or damaged, and that which might be ‘tradable’ and replaceable. For an emerging tourism destination, the assessment and evaluation of ‘natural capital’, ‘heritage capital’ and ‘cultural capital’ provides an overarching vision to better inform any models of potential development and possible conflicts. These approaches may be applied in the emerging context of ‘eco-cultural tourism’, which recognizes that the actors and stakeholders cross boundaries, share resources and compound any influences on the hosts. In particular, this idea reflects recent developments in environmental history that assert the cultural nature of many landscapes and environmental systems around the world. These concepts are being developed with exemplar case studies. Far from being ‘natural’, most landscapes and their associated ecologies are semi-natural or eco-cultural, and their richness or distinctiveness reflects an often intimate lineage of human exploitation and usage (Berkes and Folke, 1992).

The logic of natural capital outlined above is mirrored in the assessment of tourism assets and actors in the tourism landscape. This leads

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**Fig. 7.5.** Natural capital. (From Author.)
us to consider an integrated or hybrid concept of ‘eco-cultural tourism’ based on stakeholders with broadly based interests and resources that combine ecological, heritage and cultural assets. If these are to be managed to best effect, and adverse consequences of use and exploitation are to be avoided, then regional tourism development must be considered in terms of this more holistic conceptual framework. Furthermore, in assessing investment and development needs, infrastructural requirements and potential impacts, ideas of carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change can be applied. Taking this further still, we can begin to apply the tests of sustainable development to this wider tourism concept, by means of the triple bottom line (Ma et al., 2011). Within the conceptual framework for analysis, it is desirable to consider the three pillars of sustainable development: society or community, economy and environment. Because we are considering here the concept of an emerging eco-cultural tourism, then the need to establish genuinely robust assessments of impacts on people (community) and on the environment (ecology, wildlife, vegetation, landscape etc.) is paramount. Without a joined-up vision of the emerging and developing tourism sector and the assets on which it is based, assessments are generally undertaken that omit key players and essential assets. This suggests that the long-term sustainability of the tourism assets, and therefore of the industry itself, may be jeopardized or compromised through the shortcomings of the conceptual models that are applied. A key thrust of this argument is that the separation of the various tourism segments or niches can be helpful in understanding tourist behaviour, but must also recognize the intimate intertwined relationships between nature and culture. Without effective recognition of the cultural and natural components of landscape, for example, the leisure and tourism that depend on the capital resources may fail and/or be damaging.

7.12 Natural Areas as Eco-cultural Landscapes

The idea and concept of ‘natural area tourism’ presupposes that landscapes are indeed ‘natural’, which they are not (Newsome et al., 2002; O’Connor, 2000). If we apply this concept to the Green Mountain region of eastern Libya, the country’s major National Park, for example, then there is a real danger of misunderstanding the resource capital and the tourism or recreation potential. While Green Mountain has spectacular natural features with deep canyons and rolling hills, its major touristic attractions are heritage features, historical associations and archaeology. Furthermore, for the visitors, the obvious links of the region are to the coastal ruins of the great Roman settlements along the Mediterranean shore. This is an eco-cultural landscape with eco-cultural features and capital.

So-called ‘natural areas’ such as National Parks, wetlands, mountains and forests, for example, have strong natural elements, but they are essentially cultural or eco-cultural landscapes formed by long-term human/nature interactions (see Fig. 7.6). A Mediterranean scrub and grassland landscape, or the ancient lanes, hedgerows and field patterns of England’s Somerset Levels, may provide a backdrop to thriving tourism industries. Furthermore, many of the critical interactions that deliver these attractive and biodiverse landscapes have evolved over centuries to become traditions or customs. Many of the cultural manifestations, which are now tourism attractants, have themselves emerged from these complex and intimate relationships. It is these features, through buildings and archaeology, landscape patterns such as field systems, ancient hedgerows and trees, and through festivals and ceremonies, that give distinctive character to places and communities. This distinction and character is often what the tourist, knowingly or unknowingly, seeks.

7.13 Summary

To understand the complexities of the various inter-relationships outlined in this chapter, it is important to improve knowledge of tourism resources and their functioning. However, it is also necessary to recognize that the tourism and leisure visitors often take part in mixed portfolios of experiential activities that mix nature and culture, and these are not easily or exclusively classified. While separation into...
niches may aid some forms of assessment and evaluation, the effective management and support, especially for emerging tourism destinations, may benefit from more inclusive and over-arching approaches.

Applying such broad approaches may be challenging and, as I have indicated in this chapter, it requires genuine multidisciplinary collaborations. In current climates of academic and agency austerity, it is likely that the problems and misunderstandings will worsen rather than ease. Given the importance now being attached to emerging concepts of the cultural nature of landscapes, it is vital that leisure and tourism researchers and practitioners recognize the issues. Secondly, with the imperative of cultural severance and the need to support rural economies, it is necessary to address with subjects with more genuinely multidisciplinary approaches than has previously been the case. It is time to put the ‘eco’ into ecotourism and to recognize the roles of culture in nature.

7.14 Discussion Questions

- Discuss the concept of eco-tourism and comment on how and why it is often misrepresented in literature.
- When considering local small-scale tourism products, why might it be important to consider a more holistic definition of tourist?
- Why is a failure to collaborate so damaging for a tourism destination?
- What is ‘natural capital’ and how does a consideration of this assist in the management of landscape resources?

References


